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Secrecy Cloaks CIA's Role in Viet Nam

on Buddhists

[This dispatch, in a column focus charges that the central intelligence agency exceeded its authority in the United States military operation in South Viet Nam.]

BY DONALD J. MAY

Washington Oct 26 (AP)—Except for occasions when United States foreign policy troubles come crashing down around it, the central intelligence agency conducts its business in privacy, just on the edge of public awareness.

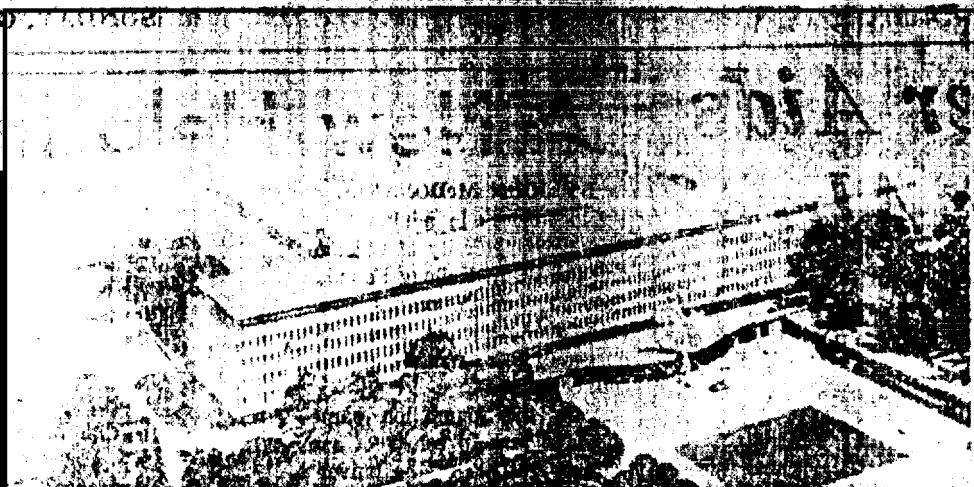
It plunged into headlines recently as part of the political crisis in South Viet Nam which, with vast United States assistance, is fighting the communist guerrillas from North Viet Nam.

John H. Richardson, first secretary of the American embassy in Saigon, was identified in newspapers as really the CIA chief there. He later was transferred. The agency itself was accused of following policies independent of Washington.

Hailed by President

President Kennedy, at a press conference Oct. 9, praised Richardson as "a very dedicated public servant" and assured newsmen flatly that the CIA has not carried out independent activities.

There the matter was supposed to end. But there remain questions about United States activities in Viet Nam wholly or in part connected with the CIA, which have never been explained.



Artist's conception of new CIA building outside Washington.

in government areas, and a number of other covert "special" jobs.

The United States assisted "special forces" which the United States also has.

Like the Vietnamese special forces are technically part of the local army, they were set up in 1961 to take their orders, in effect, directly from the Saigon palace rather than thru the Vietnamese general staff.

Nba Uses Forces

At the palace, President Ngo Dinh Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, took a particular interest in the special forces. On Oct. 1, when Nhu engineered government raids against Buddhists, he called on one unit

of the special forces to assist. This unit stood guard outside while Vietnamese police entered and raided Buddhist pagodas.

Later it was reported from Saigon that the special forces were paid from CIA funds. Washington officials have never confirmed this.

It is known that CIA maintained a close working relationship with the forces.

It has also been learned reliably that Richardson was under explicit instructions from Washington to cultivate Nhu.

Advantage of Move

The United States was thus working "both sides of the street" in Viet Nam—maintaining an overt relationship

with President Diem and a covert one with Nhu.

But it backfired on the CIA in August when Nhu suddenly became the dominant figure in Viet Nam's family government, apparently overshadowing his brother.

In Saigon, it developed many people knew who Richardson was, and they knew at least a bit about the CIA's ties with Nhu. Not only Vietnamese sources but a number of United States officials were outraged over this and denounced the CIA and Richardson to American reporters.

Much of what the CIA did in Viet Nam is presumably still unknown and probably always will be.

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